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XXIX.—BOWDLERIZED VERSIONS OF HARDY

I.

“Tess of the D’Urbervilles” was greeted with a storm of criticism, which did not abate on the appearance, four years later, of “Jude the Obscure.” Mr. Hardy seems rightly to have anticipated, in the preface to “Tess,” the feelings of the “too genteel reader who cannot endure to have said what everybody nowadays thinks and feels.” And it is true that he does exhibit in these novels a frankness of tone on all that pertains to sex somewhat unusual in England in the early nineties. But Hardy was by no means the kind of writer to disregard the predilections of his public on this or any other point of taste. There are but too many evidences of his willingness to meet them half way. And there is nothing which shows more strikingly his respect for the public taste, especially in the earlier stories, than his great delicacy, according to present standards—not to say his conventionality—in regard to matters of sex.

This shows itself, for example, in the avoidance, throughout his earlier work, of the irregular relation. Never once, in a series of nine novels, did he take such a relationship for his principal theme, nor in any case represent it in any other light than as simply criminal. In “Far from the Madding Crowd,” the seducer of Fanny may be regarded as the villain of the story,—a man justly despised by everyone who knows his character. He was himself the son of such an irregular union falling before the opening of the story—the son of a nobleman, in fact, to carry out the convention—and the reader may look for nothing better from a man with such antecedents. In two other novels

("Desperate Remedies" and "A Laodicean"), an illegitimate son is the villain of the story, and in all points the traditional melodramatic villain.

In the earlier novels, such improper relationships are relegated to the remote background, and do not form part of the action proper. In the later novels Hardy often admits them into the actual narrative. But in such cases, in the later novels, he made special provision for the sensibilities of the magazine reader. In no less than two novels which involve themes of this sort ("The Mayor of Casterbridge" and "The Well-Beloved") the reading was altered in the serial version so as to substitute a regular marriage for the illicit love affair which the story calls for. Thus in "The Mayor of Casterbridge," Michael Henchard is represented as having been actually married to Lucetta in the Island of Jersey. The alteration was made at a great expense of plausibility and art. Apparently the editor of the *London Graphic* felt he could not put before his readers a love affair not sanctioned by a marriage ceremony—though he had no objection to bigamy and the sale of a wife for money.

In "Tess of the D'Urbervilles" Hardy finds another way to meet the supposed requirements of the magazine public. It is a device familiar to the "movies," and before the day of the "movies," to those ten-cent novels advertised as "clean and wholesome" and to be "admitted to the family circle without the slightest hesitation." Whatever may be permitted to the writer of books, the writer of serials was not to take for his heroine a woman who was not technically, as well as virtually, "pure." And so, in place of the seduction of Tess by Alec, the magazine reader was informed of a "fake" marriage by which the innocent girl was entrapped. Here again the practical euphemism, as we might

call it, was perpetrated at a terrible sacrifice of art. But everybody was satisfied that nobody's morals were put in jeopardy.¹

II.

That was in the later period, when the improper relationship was brought within the compass of the story proper. In the earlier period, the story teller was not always permitted to allude in plain terms to such a relationship, even when it antedated the story, and even when he was addressing the staid reader of three volumes. In "The Return of the Native," the present reader knows that when Eustacia takes up with Clym Yeobright, she has already had some kind of intimacy with Wildeve, the sentimental inn-keeper. He probably represents that intimacy to himself as being more than Platonic; and for his interpretation he has grounds which the reader of 1878 did not have. *He* simply knew that they had been lovers of some sort. The mystery of their relation was never absolutely cleared up; and he had his choice of agreeing with Thomasin that it was "nothing but a mere flirtation," or giving credence to Mrs. Yeobright, who asserted more than once that Eustacia was not a "good girl," though unfortunately she had no "proofs" against her.² I have no doubt that the majority of readers

¹ For information concerning the changes made for the magazines in "The Mayor of Casterbridge," "The Well-Beloved," and "Tess of the D'Urbervilles," I am indebted to the studies of one of my advanced students. I am in hopes that eventually the whole investigation may see the light in the form of a Doctor's thesis.

² P. 250. Cf. pp. 136, 219, 236, 263, 432, 435. The story first appeared in *Belgravia* from January to December, 1878; the first edition in book form was published presumably late in the same year, three volumes bearing the imprint of Smith, Elder & Co. Page references in this article are all to the present standard editions, Harper's in America, Macmillan in England, which are identical in pagination.

were inclined to pass over this question lightly, grateful to the author for not insisting on his heroine's being a bad woman. There are many passages, even in the earlier version, which can have had but one meaning to the author himself;³ and I am persuaded that, from the beginning, he conceived of this love affair as no mere matter of sentiment. But he had always been a modest, not to say reticent, writer, and every provision was made in 1878 to spare the sensibilities of the magazine reader. Even towards the end of the story, when the despairing heroine agrees to accept the assistance of Wildeve in getting away from Egdon Heath, there is no suggestion of a criminal elopement. Wildeve does not propose anything of the sort to Eustacia; and when he leaves home that dark night to accompany her to Budmouth, he even has the thought of telling the whole innocent story to his wife. Eustacia is in despair when she realizes that she has no money, but not because that means she must give herself to Wildeve. It is simply her pride that cannot swallow the thought of asking him for pecuniary aid.

It is hardly necessary to point out how much difference it makes to this story whether Eustacia had been the mistress of Wildeve before she married Clym, and whether she contemplated becoming so after the marriage of both Wildeve and herself. For one thing, how different a light is thrown, according to the decision in this matter, on Clym's controversy with his mother on the subject of

These seem both to represent the revision made by Mr. Hardy in about 1895 when issuing his collected works, first under the imprint of Osgood, McIlvaine & Co. The Macmillan issue I have consulted bears the date 1902. The more recent edition de luxe (the "Wessex Edition," 1912 for this novel) has a different paging; but the passages quoted are identical with those in the earlier Macmillan edition.

³ For example, passages on pp. 73, 75, 98, 99, 100, 353, 425.

Eustacia's character! What a different sound is given to Clym's words in the great scene of remorse and jealous suspicion after his mother's death: "How bewitched I was! How could there be any good in a woman that everybody spoke ill of?"⁴ We must bear in mind that Eustacia never made any confession to Clym of the nature of her attachment to Wildeve; and we do not forget that it was just such a confession which provoked the tragedy of Tess of the D'Urbervilles, not to speak of the similar motive in "A Pair of Blue Eyes." Hardy clearly did not wish to complicate the drama of Clym Yeobright by laying too much stress upon the earlier history of Eustacia. But it will also be clear that he was not content to leave the matter in the tame light of Thomasin's interpretation.

Already in 1878 he began to show his dissatisfaction with such a gingerly treatment of his theme; and when the three volumes of the book came out, there was one notable change in evidence. It appears in connection with Mrs. Yeobright's visit to her son and his wife to inquire if they had received the money sent by Christian Cantle, which had actually by an accident been delivered to the wrong person. This misunderstanding is the starting-point of a dispute between Eustacia and Mrs. Yeobright which further alienates these women already so unfriendly. In the earlier version of this scene, however, when Eustacia has sarcastically denied their reception of any sum of money, there is nothing left to add heat to their hostile feeling. But when the story came out in book form, the dramatic character of the scene had been increased tenfold by the injection of a new issue. Mrs. Yeobright has been falsely informed—it now appears—that the money has all been delivered into the hands of Wildeve; and she at

⁴ P. 410.

once conceives the suspicion that he has passed on the money intended for Clym to Clym's wife "because she had been his sweetheart, and might be so still."⁵ It is in the spirit of this suspicion that she approaches Eustacia. Naturally Eustacia, with her pride and her guilty conscience in reference to the past, resents the imputation of receiving "dishonorable presents"⁶ now; and the reader will realize how this new element raises the whole scene to a much higher level of excitement and dramatic impressiveness.

And there the whole matter rested until 1895, when Hardy undertook a slight revision of the novel for his collected works. It was then that he made the alteration in the latter part of the story by which Wildeve is actually made to propose, and Eustacia to consider, an elopement. And it was then that he made certain additions which for the first time leave absolutely no doubt as to Hardy's interpretation of the earlier relations of the two lovers. The changes are very slight; they do not in the least affect the style or the action. But they are perhaps all the more significant. It is significant that he should have taken the pains to make alterations so minute. Two examples out of half a dozen will indicate their nature. In the conversation of Wildeve and Eustacia by her bonfire of the fifth of November, she remarks: "I have had no word with you since you—you chose her, and walked about with her, and deserted me entirely, as if I had never been yours." It is so in all the versions. But in the present version five words have been added, and what she says is now, "as if I had never been yours *body and soul so irretrievably*."⁷ A little further along she says, on his proposal to renew their nocturnal meetings: "You may come again to Rain-

⁵ P. 298.⁶ P. 300.⁷ P. 72.

barrow if you like, but you won't see me; and you may call, but I shall not listen; and you may tempt me, but I won't encourage you any more." The present form of her final declaration reads, "and you may tempt me, but *I won't give myself to you any more.*"⁸

Surely the author in 1878 made very considerable concessions to Victorian taste when he consented to leave in doubt a circumstance so important in its bearing upon the story. But there are certain passages strongly suggesting that the present version may be in some points the original one, and that the reading of 1878 represents the emasculating stroke of the editorial blue pencil. It is in connection with the proposed elopement that one feels most impelled to this hypothesis. Decidedly insufficient, in the earlier version, is the motivation of Eustacia's suicide. It is hard to believe that she would have drowned herself rather than borrow money from Wildeve. But when it is a question of giving herself in payment for his services, we can readily understand her being driven to despair. Her reluctance to renew their relation is quite in accord with her pride, her moral dignity, and her romantic imagination—all traits which have been exhibited and dwelt upon throughout the story. "'Can I go, can I go?' she moaned. 'He's not great enough for me to give myself to—he does not suffice for my desire! . . . If he had been a Saul or a Bonaparte—ah! But to break my marriage vow for him—it is too poor a luxury! . . . And I have no money to go alone.'" ⁹ So we read her words today. But in 1878—"I can't go. I can't go. . . No money; I can't go!" How inadequate a preparation

⁸ P. 74. Other slight but significant changes, in the same sense, are to be found on pp. 250, 425, 427.

⁹ P. 442.

for the black pool and the drowned bodies! And what a sacrifice of truth and dramatic point to English prudery!

That I am not making too much of this consideration of public prudery is strongly suggested by still another textual variation. This is a variation between the novel as published now by Harper in New York and by Macmillan in London. The texts are in general identical, and there is every evidence of their having been printed from the same plates. The only variation of any importance is the substitution on page 72 of one word of four letters for another of the same length. "As if I had never been yours body and soul so irretrievably" is Harper's reading of Eustacia's words. But in Macmillan, in place of "body and soul" we have "*life* and soul."¹⁰

Is it not remarkable that in the year of grace 1902, in reprinting for sale in England the text of this novel as formerly published by Harper's, reprinting it page for page and line for line, with no external evidence of its being a different edition in anything but publisher's name, the English house should have gone to the expense of altering one word on page 72? Was it the author of "Jude the Obscure" or was it the publishers who in the year 1902 could not bear the indelicacy of the word *body* in such a connection, and who felt constrained to substitute the more inoffensive, but surely the less significant, word *life*?

Of course, it is the editorial discretion which is mainly to blame for the ineptitudes of 1878. But Hardy too was discreet. It was years before he was to publish "The Mayor of Casterbridge"; still more years before "Tess" and "Jude". But in 1895 he had published "Tess" and was publishing "Jude". He was no longer required to weaken and stultify his drama by an old-fashioned ret-

¹⁰ The same reading will be found on p. 69 of the edition de luxe.

icence. He could afford to restore to their original key any passages which he had been admonished in 1878 to tone down for the benefit of the magazine reader.

III.

It was some years earlier that the tide had turned. In "The Mayor of Casterbridge" and "The Woodlanders" Hardy had given serious treatment to situations involving marital infidelity. In 1890 he contributed an article to a Symposium on "Candour in English Fiction" in the *New Review*, the other writers being Sir Walter Besant and Mrs. E. Lynn Lynton. Hardy's contribution is a vigorous protest against the emasculating of English fiction for the supposed benefit of the young people who make up to such an extent the clientele of the Circulating Library. He is especially passionate in his complaint against the literary compromises required for periodical publication. He would like to have established a special magazine for adults, in which "the position of man and woman in nature, and the position of belief in the minds of man and woman—things which everybody is thinking but nobody is saying—might be taken up and treated frankly."

The growing boldness of Hardy may be attributed to his increasing independence of Victorian taste. He was now a novelist of some popularity and established reputation, whom one might ask to collaborate with Mrs. Lynton and Sir Walter Besant in public discussion of their art! He could afford to be more independent.

That is doubtless a part of the truth. But an even larger part is probably the change in public taste which was coming about precisely in these years between 1880 and 1895. Ibsen was being introduced and fought over. In the later 80's Jones and Pinero were beginning to pro-

duce their serious problem-plays. And we have also, in the novel, some of the earlier work of George Moore and Oscar Wilde's "Picture of Dorian Gray", not to mention the more normal and British Meredith, who, in his later novels, was treating, with a cool assurance far from puritan, situations very far from "proper". In 1895 or in 1890 this sort of thing required far less daring than in 1878. In the Symposium on "Candour in English Fiction", while Sir Walter professed himself well satisfied with the rulings of Average Opinion in these matters, Mrs. Lynton, on the other hand, raised a voice much sharper than Mr. Hardy's on the subject of "English hypocrisy". The somewhat sentimental and indiscriminate character of her protest even suggests that such an attitude was coming to be *the thing*. So that perhaps, in his drift towards greater frankness and bolder realism, Hardy was still keeping within hailing distance of Public Opinion.

And when he took up the theme of "Tess of the D'Urbervilles", was he not really taking up the sort of theme which had become shopworn in the great mart of ten-cent novels? Was he not—consciously or unconsciously—moving in that current of sentiment which makes the popularity of woman novelists whose names do not often appear in the bluebooks of Literature, but who make the fortunes of the publishers of Seaside (or Bertha Clay) Libraries—the "Duchesses" and Charlotte M. Braemes, who were names to conjure with long before Mr. Hardy became the subject of literary study! The pure woman, the innocent country girl, cheated or forced into a false position; the secret to be told or to be kept silent, and in any case sure to be the source of trouble and misery; a world which will not give fair trial or a second chance to a woman with a past—are not these the very stock in trade of the paper-covered novel, which still finds its passionate

readers in so many kitchens and hall-bedrooms? It is true that these stories seldom come out tragically, like that of Tess. It is true that the heroine is seldom permitted to be even technically in the wrong, like her. But we have seen that, with the magazine public, Hardy allowed his heroine to pass for absolutely impeccable. Even in the book, she appears sufficiently in the light of a victim to make sure appeal to the Saxon chivalrous instinct. And with due allowance for the insipidity called for in a paper-covered novel, one recognizes in these machine-made tales the essential elements of Hardy's great work of art. "The Wife's Secret", "Beyond Pardon", "A Woman's Error", "One False Step", "The Shadow of a Sin": such are a few of the suggestive titles out of hundreds credited to the sole pen of one Charlotte M. Braeme, author of "Dora Thorne", and for sale at twenty-five cents each in the year 1884.¹¹

There is no absolute divorce between "literature" proper and the literature of the dime novel. Themes which receive their crudely sentimental and melodramatic treatment in the one are sure to appear above the surface, somewhat refined, it may be, but recognizable. And "Tess of the D'Urbervilles" came at a time when, in serious literature, especially in plays, a great deal of attention was being paid to the subject of the *déclassée*—the woman who would come back, the woman who lives "under the shadow of a sin", the woman who has to pay for "one false step." Across the channel, "*Le Demimonde*" was an old story. In England the more immediate currency of the theme was shown in the early nineties by the great success of "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray" and other plays of Pinero and Wilde. So that Hardy's subject was timely

¹¹ These novels are now listed under the name of "Bertha M. Clay."

from the point of view of the "high-brow" as well as popular in the original sense of the word. And the novel of Hardy's which is most satisfying to the critic for the beauty and seriousness of its art is at the same time the one to make, from the time of its first appearance, an appeal to the widest circle of readers. If it was a venture to bring the story of Tess before a public which had been shocked by "Two on a Tower" and anxiously spared in "The Return of the Native", it was a venture which proved a very safe one. It may even be that the public who were so much shocked a few years later by "Jude the Obscure", were not merely used to being shocked, but had positively come to like it, and expect it!

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